



Conserve O Gram

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Housing Archival Paper-Based Materials

Significant portions of most archival and manuscript collections are made of paper. This *Conserve O Gram* provides basic care guidelines for housing or rehousing paper-based materials. See *Conserve O Gram* 19/15, Storing Archival Paper-Based Materials, and *Conserve O Gram* 19/17, Handling Archival Documents and Manuscripts.

To Properly House Your Archival Collections You Must Do This...	Don't Do This...
<p><i>Learn What To Do Before You Begin</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Read the <i>NPS Museum Handbook</i>, Part I, particularly Appendix J, Curatorial Care of Paper Objects, Appendix M, Curatorial Care of Cellulose Nitrate Negatives, and Appendix R, Curatorial Care of Photographic Collections; <i>NPS Museum Handbook</i>, Part II, Appendix D, Museum Archives and Manuscript Collections; and <i>Conserve O Grams</i> 13/1-13/4, 19/1-19/11, and 19/15 on archival materials before you begin work.• Take an archival preservation course.• Watch an archival preservation video, such as <i>Rescuing Records: Recognizing the Problems of Preserving Documents in Research Collections</i>, available from the Smithsonian Institution Conservation Analytical Laboratory.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Don't begin housing or rehousing archival materials until you have read or studied some background material.
<p><i>Place Collections in Order Before Rehousing</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Rehouse one collection at a time.• Keep all collections separate through careful labeling to minimize the risk of intermingling different collections.• Prioritize collections for preservation and reformatting based upon their value, use, and risk. See <i>Conserve O Gram</i> 19/10, Reformatting for Preservation and Access: Prioritizing Materials for Duplication.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Don't begin to rehouse collections until the containers of materials are placed in their original order as organized by their creator.

To Properly House Your Archival Collections You Must Do This...	Don't Do This...
<p><i>Decide When a Box is Full</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regard a box as too full <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -if the box bulges -when an open hand placed between folders causes the box to bulge • Divide the contents of a box that is too full into two different boxes with the same box number and the suffixes <i>a</i> and <i>b</i> respectively. • Regard a box as underfilled if the papers and folders slump, bend, or distort. • Use acid-free supports or wedges in a box that is too loose to hold folders upright. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Don't force materials into boxes too large or too small.
<p><i>Label all Containers</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use a #2 graphite pencil to label all folders and boxes, and to mark documents when necessary. • Transfer all label information from the old folder and box to the new folder and box. • Label the folder with collection title, dates, accession and catalog numbers, box number, folder number, document types, subject matter, and the original folder heading. • Mark a document lightly, if it must be labeled, on the bottom right edge of its reverse side with a soft graphite pencil. • Label all containers with the collection name, accession/registration numbers, box number, folder and item numbers, and, if appropriate, the subjects, form, and processes. • Label all containers directly or use archival pressure-sensitive labels made of acid-free paper with stable acrylic adhesive. • Include location information in cataloging databases and finding aids. Consider preparing a shelf list that indicates the location of archival collections within the storage area. • Mark all containers that contain fragile, heavy, or oversize materials with those terms. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Don't use standard office adhesive labels on new boxes and folders because they eventually fall off and can transfer adhesive to records. • Don't affix adhesive labels to documents. • Don't use ball point or roller ball pens or magic markers to mark documents, folders, or boxes. • Don't store anything in an unlabeled container.
<p><i>Organize Different Formats for Housing</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remove special format or size materials, such as audiotapes, photographs, videotapes, films, bound volumes, oversize or friable maps and drawings, electronic media, and high value or fragile items, from archival collections and replace them with an acid-free separation sheet indicating the new location. • House the items according to their special media requirements, such as placing valuable original photographs in cold storage after duplication. • Place copies that you want to keep with the collection by media and size in separate boxes at the end after the last collection box. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Don't house all items from a single collection together without regard to size, process, or format. • Don't trim documents to make them fit containers. • Don't dispose of fragments of documents.

To Properly House Your Archival Collections You Must Do This...	Don't Do This...
<p><i>Protect Collections from Unstable Materials and Acid</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoid damage by keeping paper away from rubber bands, wood frames, rubber cement, adhesive labels, corrugated board, newsprint, cardboard, pressure-sensitive tapes, gummed tapes, corrosive iron gall inks, and liquid chemicals. • Use an archivists' pen to test housing items with a low pH. • Remember that acidic materials also tend to be brittle and non-durable. • Place highly-acidic papers, as long as they don't support charcoal, pastel, crayon, pencil or other friable media, against a buffered backing sheet and place within an inert, uncoated polyester sleeve or L-weld sleeve. • Transfer any information from the back of the document to the back of the backing sheet. • Place objects with friable media in a sink mat or in acid-free paper four-flap sleeves. • Make xerographic or digital and computer output microfilm copies of highly acidic documents for reference. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Don't house highly-acidic materials next to other unprotected papers. • Don't deacidify paper because it can result in damage to the media. The calcium carbonate reserve left by deacidification depletes over time, requiring reapplication. Deacidification doesn't substantially increase the folding strength of old paper or decrease brittleness, thus it doesn't solve the worst long-term problems of brittle/fragile documents. Leave deacidification to conservators. • Don't store color photographs, blueprints, cyanotypes or other alkaline-sensitive materials in buffered materials because this may cause color changes and image deterioration.

References

Canadian Conservation Institute, *CCI Notes* 11/2 "Storing Works on Paper." Ottawa, Canada: CCI, 1995.

Van der Reyden, Dianne. "Paper Documents," *Storage of Natural History Collections: A Preventive Conservation Approach*. Pittsburgh, PA: Society for the Preservation of Natural History Collections, 1995.

Van der Reyden, Dianne, and Diane Vogt-O'Connor. *Rescuing Records: Recognizing the Problems of Preserving Documents in Research Collections* (Videotape). Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Conservation Analytical Laboratory, 1995.

Sources

See *NPS Tools of the Trade* (available only to NPS staff) for housing and interleaving materials and a list of vendors. Archival-quality materials can be purchased from suppliers, such as the following:

Conservation Resources International, 8000-H Forbes Place, Springfield, VA 22151; (800) 634-6932 or (703) 321-7730; Fax (703) 321-0629.

Gaylord Bros., Box 4901, Syracuse, NY 13221-4901; (800) 448-6160 or (315) 457-5070; Fax (800) 272-3412.

Light Impressions Corporation, 439 Monroe Avenue, P.O. Box 940, Rochester, NY 14603-0940; (800) 828-6216 or (716) 271-8960; Fax (716) 442-7318.

Metal Edge West, Inc., 2721 East 45th Street, Los Angeles, CA 90058; (800) 862-2228 or (213) 588-2228; Fax (213) 588-2150.

University Products, 517 Main Street, P.O. Box 101, Holyoke, MA 01041-0101; (800) 628-1912 or (413) 532-9431; Fax (800) 532-9281.

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